

# Mentone Elementary Students Run and Walk Their Way to Fitness

By Kristina Hernandez, Redlands Daily Facts - Posted: 02/14/17, 5:59 PM PST

Theophilus Gutierrez may have competed Tuesday morning in his fifth Jog-a-Thon at Mentone Elementary School, but his nerves still get to him.

It isn't until he hears the month of his birthday being called that the 11-year-old fifth-grader can breathe a sigh of relief, he says. Once he hears his birthday month called, he begins to make his way through a grassy area on the school's campus where the event is traditionally held.

His goal is simple: Get in as many laps as he can. "We do this on the perfect day because the breeze always cools us down," the Mentone boy said. "This is really a good experience to be a part of. I'm so happy my school came up with this idea."

The annual Jog-a-Thon is hosted each year on or around Valentine's Day to help bring in funds to support school projects. Linda Bearden, a physical education teacher for the Redlands Unified School District, leads and organizes the event. This year's event raised nearly \$10,000, according to Bearden.

Every student at Mentone participates. Some wish to raise the most money so they are selected for a limousine ride and lunch trip to Applebee's on Redlands Boulevard, while others, like 10-year-old Natalie Voss, does it to stay healthy and on track with her running.

"I like running a lot," said the fifth-grader. "I also run with my dad in the morning and I think it's easy for me to run. It's important to keep your health active and it makes me feel a lot better."

The event began at 8:30 a.m. with second- and third-grade Mentone students. Fourth- and fifth-graders took the field shortly before 9:30 a.m., followed by kindergarten and first-grade students at 10:20.

Students who met the \$20 sponsorship goal received a special Jog-A-Thon T-shirt; some sported their new piece of clothing during the event.

As each heat took place, a local DJ spun a mix of classic and current pop, while parents captured the action on their cellphones.

After each race, students were invited to burn off any excess energy during an impromptu dance party, while others played on playground equipment nearby.

Bearden watched the action unfold with a smile. "For this year to be on Valentine's Day, what better way to 'treat your heart smart,' " she said.